

Board of Education of the Blind

H. KENNETH McCOLLAM, *Executive Secretary*

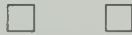
Established—1893. *Statutory authority*—Chapter 174, General Statutes

Central Office—165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford

Average number of full-time employees—58

Expenditures 1961-1962—Recurring operating expenditures, \$775,561;
Capital outlay, \$730.20

Organization structure—Three divisions: Adult Services, Business Administration, Children's Services



The purpose and function of this agency is to provide a variety of services to both children and adults whose visual acuity is reduced to 20/200 or less in the better eye with best correction, or where the central vision may be greater than 20/200 but with accompanying restriction of the field of vision to 20 degrees or less at the widest diameter.

A register is maintained of blind persons in the state and statistics are kept relating to prevalence and causes of blindness as a means of aiding in prevention of blindness. During the year there was a total of 511 individuals referred to the agency of which 325 were legally blind, while 139 were found to be not blind. The balance are still under investigation. There are presently 3,223 legally blind persons registered, of which 394 are children under 16 years of age; 1,187 are 16 to 60 years of age; 1,642 are over 61. Of the 3,223 direct services were provided 2,388. The balance of the registry was contacted by postal card for confirmation of address, need for service, and current status of vision, with approximately 60% responding.

The agency is one of 11 states selected to be a part of the Model Reporting Area organized by the Biometric Branch of the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness to provide accurate statistical data on the occurrence of blindness and its causes. To produce the statistical data required, it is planned to utilize the data processing facilities available to other state departments.

Services to Children

Through the children's services of the agency, educational programs are available to the blind child in either a residential school setting or through the public schools in the home community of the child. Preschool counseling is provided in assisting parents to better understand and meet the problems of the blind child. Medical eye care is provided where needed. Where there is a concentration of five or more children in a group of adjoining towns, arrangements are made with one of the towns to hire an itinerant teacher to serve the blind children in that area and to give consultative service to the public school teachers involved.

There are 15 regional itinerant teachers throughout the state, and three educational consultants are employed by the agency to meet needs of other areas. To supplement the textbooks in braille and large type print, furnished through a quota allotment from the American Printing House for the Blind, a federal government facility, the agency has encouraged the Connecticut Braille Association to produce additional hand transcribed material in braille on a

voluntary basis. The Recording for the Blind of New York, a non-profit organization, through a special arrangement with this agency provides textbooks on plastic discs which can be reproduced on a talking book machine.

The agency maintains a central distributing system for textbooks and tangible apparatus such as braille writers, portable typewriters, tape recorders, and other necessary devices for the use of blind children in school. An extensive library is maintained and provides an interchange of textbooks to the various schools as required.

The past year enrollment of children in the Oak Hill School, a division of the Connecticut Institute for the Blind, Hartford, was 140, while 220 other blind children attended public schools in their home communities. Included at Oak Hill School were ten children with multiple handicaps. Three deaf-blind children were enrolled at the Perkins School for the Blind at Watertown, Mass. Several other severely handicapped children were enrolled in specialized facilities to meet their particular needs.

Rehabilitation and Employment

The Board maintains a vocational rehabilitation program serving annually about 250 clients. A staff of four counselors provide counseling, guidance, physical restoration, training and placement to those who meet the requirement for eligibility and who have the promise of being rehabilitated and employed. During the past year 58 were provided service and gainfully employed. Many of the others served are under training or awaiting placement. The total cost of this federal-state program was approximately \$100,000 of which \$52,000 was from federal sources. The annual earnings of the 58 rehabilitated and employed will approximate \$200,000.

Employment of blind persons has now reached an all-time high of 619 of which 177 are in industrial positions and 442 in non-industrial activities.

Today there are 31 vending stands operated by blind persons carrying on successful businesses in the state; six are in federal buildings; two snack bar stands are on private property; 23 are located on other public property. These 31 stand locations grossed over \$640,000 during the past year resulting in an average net income of \$3,924. The agency plans to continue to develop the program through additional installations as opportunities arise.

Home Industries

The agency utilizes the services of six specially trained blind home teachers to visit the homes of blind persons and to teach skills which enable them to make adjustment to blindness and to meet the needs of daily living. Additional handskills are taught which often provide the means of earning small income through the sale of hand-made articles. Training in braille and typing is provided where this type of instruction is needed. During the past year 505 blind persons were served by the home teaching staff and 121 completed prescribed courses of instruction. Many of those served by the home teachers were materially assisted in making social and recreational contacts in their communities as a means of restoring these individuals to a normal social existence.

Many blind persons, by reason of location or other restricting factors, are confined to their homes. The agency maintains a home industries and handicraft program to provide income for this homebound group. Various types of training have been provided through the home teaching service and, through the skill of the individual, it has been possible to produce salable items which the agency purchases and offers to the public through exhibit sales. These sales are held in industrial and business firms and during the past year have grossed \$49,018. In Fairfield and New Haven Counties, the sale of Connecticut-made items has been increased through the cooperation of the Sales Division of the

Blind in Bridgeport which offers a "direct to customer" sales program in that area. Through this cooperative arrangement it has been possible to market \$18,321 of Connecticut-made goods during the past year. The net earnings to 269 blind contributors to the entire program amounted to \$24,646.

Other Services

Two social workers are employed to serve the needs of the total blind population of the state. The function of these workers is to assist the blind individual in solving his social problems and providing him with referral service to local organizations or private agencies for intensive casework. These workers arrange for medical eye care and other medical services and assist in in-take investigations of newly referred cases. During the past year 165 blind persons were served for social needs. Of this number 52 persons received \$6,063 in relief funds; \$3,815 for medical and \$2,248 for general assistance.

In October a full-time mobility instructor was added to the staff. There were 45 adults and children given cane travel instruction, 14 of whom have completed the training course and are able to travel without guide assistance.

This Board is the distributing agency for talking book machines for Connecticut made available to the blind by the Library of Congress. The machines are loaned without cost to the individual and the recordings of books are loaned free to the blind person by the New York Library for the Blind. The agency helps to defray the cost of distribution of talking books through payment made to the New York Library. The number of borrowers in Connecticut during the past year was 1,182. A program has been arranged with the Telephone Pioneers of Connecticut to assist in the repair and maintenance of talking book machines on a voluntary basis.

Through a greeting card sales program, the agency has assisted 102 blind persons to earn a total of \$3,498.

Summer vacations were made available to 50 adults and children at Harkness through cooperation with the Connecticut Institute for the Blind. Additional camp opportunities were provided to several other adults and children.

Through the generous contributions of the Delta Gamma Alumnae of Fairfield free white canes were distributed to 140 blind persons; radios were provided by the American Foundation for the Blind; braille watches by a Texas Jewelry Company. Other contributions were received from Delta Gamma of Hamden for camping and other special service for children. Additional contributions were made for special services to needy blind that could not be met through agency funds.

The Board participated in two state-wide exhibits, one in connection with the University of Connecticut Career Week, and the other a part of the 25th anniversary celebration of the State Merit System. At the latter exhibit the display of agency material and products were enhanced by live demonstrations of two blind persons doing identical jobs performed in industry and in the home. An attractive display of blind-made merchandise was exhibited.

Staff Needs

During the next biennium, if the agency is to meet the imperative needs of many blind persons in the state, it will be necessary to increase its staff by the addition of five professionally trained personnel.

In the children's services, there is urgent need for two additional educational consultants to meet the growing demands for providing special services in individual public schools scattered widely about the state. Two consultants now on the staff are unable to serve the caseload indicated.

There is need also for an educational consultant in the field of guidance to work with blind and near-blind students at the high school level.

In the administration of the agency, there is immediate need for an assistant to the chief of adult services in order to effectively meet the pressing need for services to the adult blind.
